

Executive Summary

New York has the most segregated schools in the country: in 2009, black and Latino students in the state had the highest concentration in intensely-segregated public schools (less than 10% white enrollment), the lowest exposure to white students, and the most uneven distribution with white students across schools.¹ Heavily impacting these state rankings is New York City, home to the largest and one of the most segregated public school systems in the nation.²

Forty years ago, school desegregation was a serious component of the state's education policy, as a result of community pressure and legal cases. Key desegregation cases arose throughout a number of segregated communities. The U.S. Justice Department case in Yonkers was the first in history to combine housing desegregation and school desegregation claims simultaneously. The remedy for the school desegregation case in Rochester led to one of the country's eight existing voluntary interdistrict programs. The magnet school plan for the school desegregation case in Buffalo was hailed as a model for other similar cities across the country. In New York City, a citywide desegregation case was never brought but community control of local schools sometimes helped integration efforts, as many school officials and community members challenged practices and policies that perpetuated racial imbalance and educational inequity across schools.

In light of these efforts, local and political resistance influenced New York's history of school desegregation. Around the time of Reagan's administration, the state moved away from desegregation efforts and instead focused on other practices and policies like accountability systems, school choice, and charter schools. By the early twenty-first century, most desegregation orders in key metropolitan areas were small and short-lived due to unitary status, and many programs designed to voluntarily improve racial integration levels, like magnet schools, are now failing to achieve racial balance levels due to residential patterns, a lack of commitment, market-oriented framework, and school policy reversals. In New York City, the area has been experiencing significant school choice programs and policies that are exacerbating racial isolation as demographics continue to change.

In this report, we provide a synthesis of over 60 years of research showing that school integration is still a goal worth pursuing. From the benefits of greater academic achievement, future earnings, and even better health outcomes for minority³ students, and the social benefits resulting from intergroup contact for all students – like the possible reduction in prejudice and greater interracial communication skills – we found that “real integration” is indeed an invaluable goal worth undertaking in growing multiracial

¹ Orfield, G., Kucsera, J., & Siegel-Hawley, G. (2012). *E pluribus...separation? Deepening double segregation for more students*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Civil Rights Project.

² Fessenden, F. (2012, May 11). A portrait of segregation in New York City's schools. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/05/11/nyregion/segregation-in-new-york-city-public-schools.html?_r=0

³ For the purposes of this report, we define minority as black, Latino, American Indian, Asian, Pacific Islander, and multi-racial students.

societies.⁴ Can separate be equal, yes. If measured by test scores, a few resegregated schools show high performance. But even if equality can be reached between racially isolated schools, students may never achieve the skills and abilities required to navigate an increasingly diverse nation.

Due to such benefits of racial integration, we next explore the demographic and segregation patterns across New York over the last 20 years in a variety of geographical areas. A number of findings resulted from this analysis.

For one, we found a growing diversity of student enrollment in schools and school districts across the state and main metropolitan areas, particularly in urban schools. This changing demography, accompanied by a lack of diversity-focused policies over the last two decades, has inevitably been linked to another main finding: persisting segregation patterns, and in some contexts, an increase. With school poverty so closely linked to so many harmful social and educational conditions and outcomes, we then explored a number of associations between race and class, leading to another main finding: the overexposure to low-income students for black and Latinos across geographical levels. Next, we found high racial isolation for the average charter school and lower segregation for the average magnet school across New York City. However, we did find substantial variation within magnets with close to 20% enrolling less than 1% of white students. Finally, due to the lack of voluntary metropolitan or other large interdistrict policies across upstate New York, as well as the proliferation of numerous small, fragmented school districts, we found that the majority (close to 90% or above) of segregation is occurring among rather than within upstate districts. Specific findings at various geographical levels include:

Statewide:

- At the state level, the proportion of Latino and Asian students in New York has nearly doubled from 1989 to 2010.
- Concentration levels in intensely-segregated schools, where less than 10% of the student body is white, have increased for black students, and there has been a dramatic increase in black exposure to Latino students over the last 20 years.
- Latino and Asian isolation have also increased, while exposure of these groups to white students has decreased.
- In terms of poverty concentration, statewide patterns indicate that as a school becomes heavily minority, the school also becomes more low-income.
- Nearly half of public school students in New York were low-income in 2010, but the typical white student attended school where less than 30% of classmates were low-income. Conversely, the typical black or Latino student attended a school where close to 70% of classmates were low-income.

New York Metropolitan Area:

⁴ Walker, V. S. (2009). Second-class integration: A historical perspective for a contemporary agenda. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(2), 269-284.

- For the New York City metro in 2010, the five boroughs represented nearly 60% of the state's total black students, two-thirds of the total Asian and Latino students, but only 10% of white students.
- Only 20% of total school districts across the metro were considered diverse⁵ in both 1999 and 2010. Of these diverse districts, less than a third were racially stable.⁶ Both percentages are quite low for such a diverse metro.
- Charter schools take the metro's segregation to an extreme. In Bronx, Brooklyn, and Manhattan (where charter schools are a significant proportion of total schools), nearly all charters were intensely segregated in 2010 with less than 10% white student enrollment (100% of the Bronx charters, 90% of those in Brooklyn, and 97% of the Manhattan charters were intensely segregated).
- Both the inner-ring region of the metro (consisting of Rockland and Westchester counties) and New York City region experienced a segregation increase (i.e., uneven distribution) between white and black students over the last 20 years.
- In the inner-ring region, the typical white student attended school with half the proportion of poor students in the region, even as the typical black or Latino student attended school with around twice the regional proportion of poor students.
- The proportions of black and Latino students attending intensely segregated schools in Yonkers City School District increased from 5% to nearly 50% from pre-unitary status (1989 or 1999) to post-unitary status (2010).

New York City:

- Across the 32 Community School Districts (CSDs) in New York City, 19 had 10% or less white students in 2010, which included all districts in the Bronx, two-thirds of the districts in Brooklyn (central to north districts), half of the districts in Manhattan (northern districts), and only two-fifths of the districts in Queens (southeast districts).
- In 2010, Staten Island's CSD 31 had the highest white student proportion at 53% for the city, but the district also had substantial internal variation, with a third of schools serving greater than 80% of white students and another third serving less than 40% of white students. While much smaller proportions of white students are enrolled in other CSDs, they often follow similar patterns of extreme variation among schools, even within the most gentrified districts.
- Across New York City, 73% of charters were considered apartheid schools (less than 1% white enrollment) and 90% percent were intensely segregated (less than 10% white enrollment) schools in 2010. Only 8% of charter schools were multiracial⁷ and with over a 14.5% white enrollment (the New York City average); these included the Brooklyn Prospect Charter, Community Roots Charter, and Our World Neighborhood Charter, among others.

⁵ Diverse districts are broadly defined as those with more than 20% but less than 60% nonwhite students.

⁶ Stable districts are those that experienced a white % change less than 2 times the metro white % change between time periods.

⁷ We define multiracial schools are those with any three races representing 10% or more of the total student body.

- Magnet schools across the New York City district had the highest proportion of multiracial schools and lowest proportion of segregated schools. However, 17% of magnets had less than 1% white enrollment and 7% had greater than 50% white enrollment, with PS 100 Coney Island having a white proportion of 81%.

Upstate Metropolitan Areas:

- Quite possibly due to the elimination of Buffalo's desegregation order in 1995, black and Latino students in the metropolitan area experienced a substantial increase in the percentage concentrated in intensely-segregated schools since 1989.
- In the Syracuse metropolitan area, the proportion of black students grew by 4% points, but black isolation rates skyrocketed from 1989 to 2010. The average black student attended school in 1989 with a third of students from their own race; twenty years later, the typical black student attended schools with nearly half black students.
- At the district level, the majority of school districts in Upstate New York remain predominately white. In the Rochester metro, however, near a quarter of school districts are drastically changing with the majority substantially integrating nonwhite students.
- In Buffalo, the typical white student attended a school with 30% of poor students in comparison to 73% of poor students for the typical black student.
- In the Albany metro, 97% of the metro's multigroup segregation – measured by the distribution of racial groups in schools across the metro – occurred between rather than within districts. A total of 59 out of 65 districts in 2010 were predominately white or nonwhite.

From these main and specific findings, we provide a number of policy recommendations that should be implemented (or are being implemented but need further support) at the local, state, and federal level to create and maintain integrated schools across New York. These include:

- The state and local education agencies need to develop policies (e.g., controlled choice) that focus on reducing racial isolation, promoting diverse schools, and ensuring an equal distribution of resources. Such policies should address how agencies can create student assignment and choice policies that foster diverse schools, discuss how to recruit a diverse teaching staff, provide a framework for developing and supporting intra and inter-district or universal programs, reinforce a commitment to achieving racial and economic diversity, and require that districts report to the state or local agency on diversity-related matters for all (regular, magnet, specialty, and charter) schools.
- Districts should develop policies that consider race among other factors in creating diverse schools. Charters can implement other creative strategies, such as strategic location, weighted admissions, and target recruitment.
- Magnet schools and transfer programs within and across district borders should also be used to promote more racially integrated schools, without sacrificing any

- diversity currently present in traditional schools. However, magnets, or any choice program for that matter, must have a commitment toward increasing racial and economic integration, recruit actively to create a diverse student body, provide transportation for students, and have no academic screening mechanisms.
- Initiatives should be created to help lead and manage regional or interdistrict programs in urban/suburban areas. Efforts should also be made to foster the development of suburban coalitions to influence state-level policy-making around issues of school diversity and equity.
 - With housing and school segregation highly correlated, local fair housing organizations should monitor land use and zoning decisions and advocate for low-income housing to be set-aside in new communities that are attached to strong schools. Municipal housing policies should also be tied to equitable education policies. The twenty-year battle in Yonkers, and the recent case in Westchester County serve as examples.
 - Local educational organizations and neighborhood associations should vigorously promote diverse communities and schools as highly desirable places to live and learn.
 - Interested citizens and elected officials should support judicial appointees who understand and seem willing to address the history of segregation and minority inequality and appear ready to listen with open minds to sensitive racial issues brought into their court rooms.
 - All school choice policies should be subject to civil rights standards. These initiatives should promote the voluntary integration of students (i.e., diversity goals) while ensuring transparency, transportation, parental engagement, and school quality. School districts should also ensure that each choice initiative is uncomplicated, and all students and parents, particularly hard-to-reach families, are fully aware of their educational options and provided with resources and appropriate guidance.

For New York to have a favorable multiracial future both socially and economically, it is absolutely urgent that its leaders and citizens understand both the values of diversity and the harms of inequality. A number of policy options are available to provide hope for a more equitable and culturally enriching education for the state of New York.